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ADDRESS

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE

Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society,

AT THEIR

ANNUAL MEETING,

MAR 29, 1795.

By GEORGE RICHARDS MINOT,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.



FROM THE ORRERY PRESS :

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BOSTON, 1795.

At a Meeting of the GOVERNMENT of the MASSACHUSETTS CHARITABLE FIRE SOCIETY, on Friday, May 29, 1795,

Voted, That the Thanks of the GOVERNMENT be given to **GEORGE RICHARDS MINOT, Esq.** for his Address, delivered before the Society this day—And that a Copy thereof be requested for the Press.

Voted, That **WM. TUDOR, Esq. Dr. OLIVER SMITH** and the Rev. Mr. **JAMES FREEMAN**, be a Committee to wait on him with the above Vote.

A true copy—Attest

WILLIAM ALLINE, Rec. Sec.



GENTLEMEN,

AN ardent wish to promote the objects of the Society led me to undertake this sudden production. A respect for the body who request a Copy induces me to submit it to the public eye, with no other security against censure, than the candor of the reader, founded on the uprightness of my intentions.

I am,

Gentlemen,

With the highest respect,

Your obedient servant,

G. R. MINOT.



A N

ADDRESS, &c.

Mr. PRESIDENT, and GENTLEMEN of the SOCIETY,

AS the part which I bear in the duties of this occasion is in consequence of a request from your TRUSTEES, unavoidably sudden, I can stand in need of no apology to you for undertaking a task, which nothing but a sense of my obligation to comply with a vote so honorable to me, and a sincere desire to promote the objects of this Institution, could have induced me to attempt with so short a notice: but, as it regards the REST of this respectable auditory, I indeed feel myself in need of too great a demand upon their candor, for delivering in their presence, literally the reflections and exercises of a few hours, upon a subject which ought to receive mature consideration, and which is worthy of an elaborate discussion.

WHOEVER

WHOEVER views the physical and moral systems of which we are a part, will perceive a variety of causes to call forth the virtues and exertions of man. Amidst the prevailing harmony which PROVIDENCE has ordained in the world, the observer will be struck with an occasional and limited disorder, which, although unable essentially to deform the grand fabric of creation, yet for a moment interrupts its regularity, and darkens the splendor of its appearance. General causes, at times, seem to overstep the bounds of their commission, and to create partial evils so distressing to our race, that, unless we comprehensively survey the greater good which predominates on the whole, we shall feel a diminution of our confidence in the station we hold as the dependants of perfect benevolence.

IN the moral world the human passions have been permitted so to triumph over reason, that the vices have stalked abroad, and become rather the boast than the shame of man. His feelings have been led back to their natural standard by various means, not necessary to be recited on this occasion. Among them, however we may observe, as not the least useful, voluntary associations, which although from a happy progress in civilization, they are now rendered less necessary, must, notwithstanding, be remembered with gratitude and pleasure. In the physical world the causes of evil seem to be less under human control. Societies of men may become, what their
CREATOR

CREATOR has enabled them to be, pious, philanthropic, candid in opinion and charitable in their actions: But, the bursting volcano who can extinguish? The overflowing ocean who can limit? What human power checks the whirlwind's sweep? And who can pacify the conflicting elements, when united to disorganize the regular course of their operations?

AN attempt to prevent such evils would be presumption in mankind. They have only to submit to them with humble resignation. They are to consider that, as in the human heart there is no vice which springs not from the same cause with some neighboring virtue, so in natural appearances good and evil shoot forth from the same principles. That element which in one climate with irresistible explosions desolates the devoted regions around it, and which, at times, sweeps off cities in sheets of flame, generally becomes the submissive and useful agent of man in ten thousand forms; contributes to his pleasure and security; and animates the whole vegetable world in serene and smiling verdure. The whirlwind is but the momentary passion, if I may be allowed the term, of the winds which give motion to commerce, of the air which gives us breath, of the breeze which exhilarates and revivifies the exhausted laborer. The inundating river which sweeps the adjacent villages down its destructive stream, soon subsides to its useful level, and leaves on its banks the rich source of fertility and happiness.

BUT

BUT the most interesting and important view in which both moral and physical evils can be considered, is that of a touchstone to the human heart. Were there no misery, where then should we look for humanity? Did man inhabit a world of happiness, how many virtues which his CREATOR has planted in his bosom, would go down with him unbudded to the grave? The occasion for exercising the sublime and charitable attributes of his nature, is the most enviable gift of HEAVEN. When Misfortune, shrouded in the garb of Poverty, knocks at the rich man's door, how interesting is that moment to the human character! Then comes forth the dignified Image of man's CREATOR, or the mean contemptible mimic of a rational Being. Is the stranger welcomed? Is his hunger satisfied? Are his limbs, shivering with cold, comfortably clad? Is he freed from the grasp of greedy avarice in the forms of law? If so, the tenant of that mansion well executes the trust committed to his charge, by the AUTHOR of all his bounty: If not, although the wealth of India decorate his habitation, although human honors be heaped high upon his head, he is in fact poorer, and far lower in the order of creation than the suppliant visitor whom he scorns from his door.

SINCE there are evils beyond the power of man to prevent, it is his duty to alleviate their effects, and minister consolation to the objects who are destined

to endure them. Such is the principle on which you, Gentlemen, are associated. Of the causes of misfortune with which society is afflicted, you have justly observed the destruction of buildings by fire to be one of the most calamitous. In a country like ours, where convenience and the habits of the people have led to the use of the most perishable materials, and where the active exertion of the inhabitants in the hour of danger, and their generous donations after it, have hitherto prevented an *insurance* against fire (a safeguard which many suppose would equalize the loss upon the community on a still more extensive scale) the evils arising from the ascendancy of this element, have been frequently and deplorably conspicuous. Since the settlement of our country upwards of twenty fires, so extensive in their desolation as to be selected for the records of history, have happened in our Capital. The particulars of these would be too tedious, and indeed, too melancholy to be detailed. Eight of them took place before the introduction of fire-engines into the town, which probably was not until after the year One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eleven. In the fire of that year, the town-house, the first meeting-house, and the neighborhood of those buildings fell before it; and it was designated by the name of the *Great Fire* until that of One Thousand Seven Hundred and Sixty took from it this nominal pre-eminence in the catalogue of destruction. In this year
the

the fire swept away no less than three hundred and forty-nine buildings; destroyed property to the amount of one hundred thousand pounds sterling; two hundred and twenty families were driven from their habitations; and three quarters of them rendered incapable, by this misfortune, of subsisting themselves. The destruction of One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-seven and of the last year we all remember. The tear of distress is scarcely dried, your bounty is still rising a fresh and grateful offering to the throne of HEAVEN. Yes, we remember the solemn alarm; the almost uncontrollable devastation of the flames; the houseless exile running from their reach in wild despair, in doubt; perhaps, whether his absent offspring be fallen by their devouring rage, or whether it still wanders subject to be crushed by the agitated crowd; we remember the scene of all his sufferings intruded glaringly on his view by the unnatural illumination of the atmosphere; his dreadful reverse of fortune when the catastrophe was over:—One day in credit, in peace and in enjoyment; the next, though not dishonored, yet perhaps a bankrupt, distracted with reflection, and forced to wander over the scene of his distress to collect the pitiful fragments of his property. There are objects that have made deep impressions on your hearts. Honorable feelings! Hence may we ascribe the origin of your institution for relieving such victims of affliction, and for stimulating genius to useful

ful discoveries tending to secure the lives and property of our fellow-men. This is the noblest offering you can make to your country and to mankind. An Institution designed to relieve without mortifying the object relieved, and to give without distressing the generous benefactor. An institution that shall not require of dejected merit to assume a boldness which prosperity would not inspire it with, nor force it, unused to ask a favor, publicly to beg for charity; but which shall give it the right of demanding, whenever it brings the marks of misfortune.

Is it necessary for us to announce to the world that a society formed on such a basis in Massachusetts, has received the encouragement naturally to be expected from the generous manners and lively feelings of her inhabitants? Although our incorporation bears date only from the twenty-fifth day of June last, yet our funds are already so respectable as to furnish a pleasing expectation, that we shall soon be able, with the aid of such of our fellow-citizens as may reasonably be supposed to join in our charitable views, to administer consolation under one of the heaviest afflictions in life, by bestowing some proportionable indemnity for losses sustained by fire. Our numbers are already upwards of *three hundred*, and among them we can hold up characters whom the wealthy and well-disposed, need not be ashamed to follow in the path of benevolence. It would be unjustly to withhold the tribute of our thanks, were

I not to say, that the man whom the people have again called to the second magistracy of our Commonwealth, deserves public praise for uniting the influence of his station with the generous benefaction of his property, to aid the cause of the distressed, as the head of this Institution.

IN addition to the usual means of enlarging the funds of the Society, our constitution has ordered this annual assembling of its members, to discourse upon the advantages arising from charitable institutions, and to bear testimony of our attachment to the generous principles by which we are combined, by a contribution of our property in common with such other friends of humanity, as may feel the same sensations for suffering merit.

IN a world filled with opposition, there have not been wanting objectors even to charities. Many of them are framed merely as an apology for avarice and meanness of spirit. Some of them however deserve consideration; and particularly that of bestowing the gifts of liberality on unworthy objects. But it is the good fortune of our Institution, that even this objection cannot apply to it. The evidence of misfortune, from the nature of it, must be too notorious to be misunderstood. When the sufferer comes recent from the scene of his distress, an outcast from his habitation, naked as the flames have left him, who can hesitate to ^{allow} ~~deny~~ his claim to participate in the property, which our happier fortune has prevented

vented *our* losing by the same melancholy cause. Nor is it a circumstance to be attended to, whether he be of one denomination or another; for it is the boast of our Institution, that although its benefits are necessarily local, in order to make them efficient, yet they are not confined to ourselves, to sect, or kindred.

THE necessity of charities is clearly announced by the whole structure of the human system. The sun of prosperity, like the natural sun of the universe, shines not with perpetual brightness any where. Clouds are always interfering and obstructing its genial influence, and over whose head they will gather, or how long they will continue, is known only to HIM whom the winds and clouds obey. If we enjoy the sunshine of the hour, it is equally our duty and our policy to relieve him who is suffering in the shade of adversity; and when, in turn, he enjoys the calm, and we become involved in the tempest, we shall merit, and, if he possesses the gratitude of his nature, we shall receive of him a shelter from its inclemency. And should we fail in this, still our happiness will not be lost, as there is no heart so insensible to self-approbation as not to anticipate its reward by the very exercise of its kindness. At any rate, the day of life is fast passing away, and a new light will appear, which, with irresistible effulgence, will discover even the most latent acts of virtue, when it will receive a reward inconceivable

conceivable by the human mind, and transcending all human felicity.

LET us then follow the generous impulse of our nature, and give our alms with liberality. Let us invite the assistance of either sex and all classes of people at this philanthropic offering on the altar of charity. The female heart is the liveliest source of sensibility, and pity springs thence, as from its native bosom. We welcome our visitors from the fairest portion of the human race! We welcome every one whose feelings extend beyond himself, and who waits not to hear the piercing cries of those who are ready to perish, to awaken his humanity. You who seek to immortalize your names by structures of brass and marble, come and be enrolled on the nobler monument of human gratitude. There is a luxury in this generous indulgence of our feelings, unknown to other enjoyments. Were we to select the happiest and the most worthy among men, it would be he, whose neighborhood is the world, whose kindred are mankind, and whose disposition prompts him to exert all his means of conferring happiness upon his suffering fellow-mortals, of whatever persuasion they may be in this various family, and in whatever part of that world they may chance to dwell.

END OF THE ADDRESS.

ACT of INCORPORATION.

COMMONWEALTH of MASSACHUSETTS.

In the Year of our LORD one thousand seven hundred and ninety four.

An ACT for Incorporating certain Persons into a Society by the Name of the MASSACHUSETTS CHARITABLE FIRE SOCIETY.

WHEREAS Moses Gill, George Richards Minot, Oliver Smith, James Freeman, James Bowdoin, William Seollay, John Lucas and Arnold Welles, jun. in behalf of themselves, and others associating with them, have petitioned this Court to be incorporated for the purpose of relieving such as may suffer by fire, and of stimulating genius to useful discoveries, tending to secure the lives and property of their fellow men from destruction by that element.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, *That* the persons above named, and their associates be, and hereby are incorporated into, and made a body politic by the name of the Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society, for the purposes aforesaid, and shall have perpetual succession by the said name, with power to make bye-laws and regulations for the preservation and advancement of the said Society, not repugnant to the laws of this Commonwealth, with penalties either of disfranchisement from the said Society, or of a mulct, not exceeding twenty shillings, for each offence, as to the said Corporation shall appear best.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, *That* the said body politic are hereby authorized and empowered to make and use a common seal, and to sue and defend, and are made liable to be sued by the name aforesaid in any of the Judicial Courts within this Commonwealth, and are hereby licenced and empowered to make purchases, and to receive grants, subscriptions and donations of real and personal estate, and to hold the same for the charitable purposes aforesaid, provided the income of the said real and personal estate shall not exceed the sum of ten thousand pounds annually, and to alien and convey such estate as to the said Corporation shall appear fit.

Be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, *That* the said body politic be, and are hereby authorized to meet annually on such day as they shall appoint, and then to choose such officers as to them may appear necessary; and to meet at such other times for filling up vacancies occasioned by

by the death or resignation of officers or otherwise, and for transacting all other business requisite for promoting the ends of the said Corporation, as by them shall be agreed upon.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That His Honor Moses Gill, Esq. be, and he is hereby authorized and empowered to call the first meeting of the said Corporation at such place in the town of Boston as to him may appear proper, on the fourth Tuesday of July next.

In the House of Representatives, June 25th, 1794.—This Bill having had three several readings passed to be enacted.

EDWARD H. ROBBINS, Speaker.

In Senate, June 25th, 1794.—This Bill having had two several readings passed to be enacted.

SAMUEL PHILLIPS, President.

June 24, 1794.—By the Governor approved.

SAMUEL ADAMS.

True copy—Attest,

JOHN AVERY, jun. Secretary.

The GOVERNMENT for the YEAR 1795.

HIS Honor Moses Gill, *President.*
 Honorable George Richards Minot, Esq. *Vicepresident.*
 Doctor Oliver Smith, *Treasurer.*
 Reverend James Freeman, *Corresponding Secretary.*
 Mr. William Alline, *Recording Secretary.*
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